

Book Review

Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction 2011 Deborah Bird Rose. Published by University of Virginia Press, USA. 168 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8139-3091-6 (hard copy) \$29.50 ISBN: 978-0-8139-3107-4 (e-book)

The Australian 'wild dog' is an animal that crosses-disciplines, divides culture, questions scientific concepts, and raises doubt about ethical and moral standards. Nothing about them is cut and dried, and *Wild dog dreaming* exemplifies this. In this discourse on human-nature relationships, Deborah Bird Rose (Macquarie University Centre for Research on Social Inclusion) uses the dingo enigma to explore purpose and meaning.

This is prefaced in the blurb that described the book as 'a bold account of the entangled ethics of love, contingency, and desire'. If I were to give the book a genre, then I would say it fills the gaps between savagery, sentience, spirituality, and synergism. Written from perspectives acquired during studies of anthropology, philosophy, history, culture and religion, Rose's style is a hypothetical, informal exploration of human psychologies whilst interacting with nature. Wild dogs provide many analogies representative of modern society, for everything from broken families through to education and polity. Rose presumably draws on these similarities to reduce the condescension of animals by humans.

Wild dog dreaming was written with penetrating language. Humans after all are the dominant force behind Earth's sixth mass extinction event in observable history. Do we really believe that other animals don't think about the ecological gaps created by extinction? Ecology is all about the distribution, abundance and interactions of living things, and non-human animals obviously acknowledge gaps instinctively. Rose is suggesting in no uncertain terms that if there is a hole in a bucket that is full of water, and nothing to plug the hole, then the bucket will leak. In Australia's case of mammalian extinctions, the bucket has a big hole and much water has been lost ... Water essential to the concept of humanity. Here Rose quotes Indigenous actor David Gulpilil to make her point – 'We are brothers and sisters of the world. Doesn't matter if you're a bird, snake, fish, kangaroo: One red blood.'

The contents page is a great example of the sword Deborah draws for battle. Phrases that makes one search for meaning such as *Love and Extinction* in the title, or *Ruined Faces* in chapter 9, *The Unmaking* in reference to wild dogs that have been skinned and hung from trees. Chapter one for instance is a question: 'Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?' What or who is *Wisdom*? Is *Wisdom* lost? Can *Wisdom* be found? Where should I look for *Wisdom*? Does *Wisdom* exist in classical, quasi or pseudo-experiments? Is everybody looking for the same *Wisdom* or are there different wisdoms? In addition words such as *Face*, *Love*, *Singing*, and *Grief*, and renowned names including *Bobby*, *Orion*, *Job*, and *Solomon* greet us and provide the book with that air of eeriness. Will contemporary stories survive another 2000 years, just like theirs?

Rose for instance writes of Job from the Holy Bible because God did neither allow Job to live as a whole human, nor to die a humane death. Job ironically suffered under the hands of God because Job had never sinned. This is how wild dogs are generally managed. Even if wild dogs do no harm, they are discriminated for being wild dogs. I would have liked Rose to discuss legislative and political obligations of individuals and organisations here, because they too show contradictory features. From research articles I have read, wild dogs maintain ecological processes unless humans disrupt the pack. This disruption is instead threatening the viability of natural systems, exacerbating human/livestock-dingo conflict and working against the objectives of some legislative acts. God's discrimination of Job is also counterproductive to Gods aim of, or for, 'humanity'. Dangling dogs' by their digits to display dominance over nature doesn't really send a message of morality to other humans, and possibly breeds aggression.

Some scientists may not like *Wild dog dreaming* because there are no quantitative data, or statistically significant results. Then again, some scientists do not trust statistically significant results anyway! If you are one of the latter, do you instead believe in God and if so, have you considered whether 'an agnostic insomniac who suffers from dyslexia' (p16) created God or not? Do you care? On the other hand, if you are a scientist that has faith in the myth of Creationism and exorcises Darwinism as a theory (obviously created by Man almighty to test faith), then this book might cause you to grind your teeth until they bleed. Where do your values lie? Deborah does respectfully massage the Holy Bible in this text. After all, it is the 'lamb of God' that we are saving from the wild dogs' jaws, is it not? Perhaps if you read *Wild dog dreaming* you too will find yourself asking what the difference is between Christianity and Totemism ... or life and death.

Questioning your own morals and ideals whilst you are reading will make this book more fun. As you delve deeper into the thoughts of philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, biologists, ecologists, poets, feminists and other storytellers, you will find yourself re-drawing the long bow. How does it all fit together? Why is Rose making me think like this? What does this have to do with extinctions? I must admit that I am a fan of 'the search', whether it is a new point break to surf, or packs of dingoes and their den. Searching for answers however, within the thoughts of people you may have never heard of such as Existential philosopher Lev Shestov, anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl, or old Aboriginal teacher Tim Yilngayrri is a task. I found the trick was to let the answers find me when I was ready. Arguably a stroke of excellence in Rose's writing style.

Wild dog dreaming is Deborah's second book using dingoes as a metaphor to explore connectedness between humans and country. In *Dingo makes us human* (Cambridge University Press), Rose recounted her experiences and thoughts whilst living with the Yarralin Aboriginal Community. In both books, this is where Rose reveals her own ideals in romanticising traditional indigenous society as stable and ecologically balanced. Whilst clans may have acknowledged the sovereignty of nations, colonists also reported warfare between clans. The ability of leaders to improve access to resources is one of, if not the major driver of biological fitness and evolution. Are wild dogs simply trying to improve access to resources for their pack, to increase biological fitness? The pensiveness here is the oxymoronic definition of sovereignty, where supreme powers *control* adjacent states, such as wild dogs redistributing kangaroos, and humans redistributing wild dogs. What constitutes a nation, let alone a sovereign nation? Where do the powers lie?

I feel I was afforded luck with *Wild dog dreaming* because I read it whilst travelling the world as part of a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust travel fellowship. Similar to a wild dog on an extraterritorial foray, I travelled between and through territories, and traversed cultures both stabilised and disrupted by opposing ideals and perceptions. Experiencing things such as sites of Polish

massacres by the Nazi regime in an old growth forest originally protected by Russian Tsar's and currently protected by the United Nations. Or the Yellowstone Gray wolf reintroduction program, and sites in Idaho where livestock depredation has been mitigated using non-lethal management techniques during the re-colonisation by wolves. Sites of both love and of hatred. Plus I read *Wild dog dreaming* after Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, which told the story of a totemistic Mongolian culture being assailed by a materialistic Chinese culture. These were incredibly relative experiences for my interpretation of *Wild dog dreaming* and you may have a completely different interpretation.

Wolf-like dogs and humans have coevolved so closely that we will never be separated. All in all, Rose questions the 'business as usual' dogmas forcing people and organisations to ignore ethics and morals, so they can hang wild dogs by their toes in trees to drip dry. Her reasoning is that the consequences of some actions, or inactions, are permanent physical and psychological scars. I recommend *Wild Dog Dreaming* because in comparison with other wild dog works it is abstract and enlightening. Actually you should read it, simply to learn more about ... well, lets just say the 'flip side' of your own position.

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***Field Guide to the Frogs of Queensland.* 2012. Eric Vanderduys. CSIRO Publishing. ISBN 9780643106307 RRP \$45.00**

Frogs can be tricky little creatures to identify. Individuals within a species can be highly variable in pattern; similar looking species can overlap in range or share boundaries and to the untrained eye a *Crinia* is as much a little brown blob with legs as a *Uperoleia*. In many cases, some species can only be confidently identified based on their call. This doesn't help much when you find them under a rock or at the bottom of a pitfall trap.

So it was with great expectation and relief when Eric Vanderduys's *Field guide to the frogs of Queensland* was finally released. Here we have a field guide that makes a concerted attempt at helping clarify who is who, why that is so and where they are likely to be found. And it is a job well done!

To start there are multiple comprehensive and meticulous diagnostic keys. One provided for the family level and additional keys to all the genera, down to species level where more than one representative from each genus is known to occur in Queensland. The many finely detailed and clearly marked technical illustrations help the reader to ascertain exactly what they need to be looking at in order to progress through the identification process.

The real strength of the field guide is that the short comings of other diagnostic keys, through the use of obscure characteristics and ill-defined features have been avoided. Instead the author incorporates a combination of distribution parameters, call distinction and illustrated pattern accentuation to provide the reader with confidence and clarity in the use of the keys.

What is particularly useful both in the keys and species descriptions are the many onomatopoeically described calls. Some calls are described as in the original species description with many given unique and apt descriptions in the authors own style. For example the call of *Mixophyes coggeri* is described as a "gorgeous, liquid baritone 'waark ... waark'." Furthermore the calls of some frogs are compared with closely related species to help emphasise and highlight the differences between them, advantageously providing the reader with a better grasp for how the call sounds. A prime example is illustrated with the call of *Mixophyes iteratus*. Given as a "low, often soft 'ork', somewhat relaxed, lack[ing] the urgency of *M. fasciolatus*."

Every one of the 132 species of frog known to occur in QLD has been assigned to their own page. In most instances, multiple photographs accompany each species profile. This goes a long way in helping to account for the inherit variation found amongst individuals within a species as well as discerning the differences between adults, juveniles and the sexes.

Complementing the photographs is meticulous text which includes thorough details on size, body shape and colour, identifying where each bump and lump or stripe pattern is to be found on a frog. Even the toes get a mention! All manner of toe webbing, fringing, truncation or flattening is included. The field guides ease of use is maintained with the inclusion of photographs, maps and description relevant to each species included on one page. Amongst the species descriptions are species profiles for those frogs whose occurrence in Queensland is uncertain either due

to dubious historical records or because of unresolved taxonomy. Rather than omit these species, the author has been judicious with including them, providing information to clarify how their inclusion into the Queensland frog fauna may have come about

Several other features of *Field guide to the frogs of Queensland* really go a long way to make it easy to use and help with the confirmation of identification. The first is the inclusion of specific fine scale mapping for both the *Crinia* and *Uperoleia* groups which serves to clarify and identify the distributions of sympatric and similar looking species from both these diverse groups. In addition a 'Notes' section in the back helps to identify and differentiate between other comparable species and those with unclear overlapping distributions.

Additionally, interspersed throughout the multiples keys, species descriptions and notes are illuminating facts making this a very handy guide to help the user elucidate what exactly it is they have in their hand.

Clearly this is a field guide written by a frogger for other froggers. It is quite apparent that many, many hours in the field have gone into collating the unmatched wealth of knowledge that forms the core of this field guide. Therefore as well as becoming an indispensable resource for the professional, the clear, unambiguous, simplicity of the information provided certainly makes it an easy and accessible resource for all users.

George Madani